



# **Mid Session Legislative Forum**

with

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### **Legislators Focus on Improving Public Education**

Legislators have made improving the state's education system a top priority this session. From repairing and maintaining our public school facilities, to creating a standard core curriculum for all public schools, to enhancing work force development programs, legislators in both houses are determined to make substantial contributions to our educational system this session. In addition to acting on numerous educational bills moving through the legislature this session, the Senate is also currently reviewing the House's proposed state budget for fiscal year July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007. Following are some key educational appropriations proposed in the House's state budget:

- \$256,204,000 in improvements to public school facilities, including \$160 million to complete renovations at 96 schools statewide and \$50 million for repairs and maintenance statewide
- \$20 million to help ease schools' transition to the Weighted Student Formula
- \$24 million to implement a single, system-wide uniform school calendar
- \$2 million to purchase more science textbooks and classroom science equipment
- \$2.4 million to help classroom teachers purchase classroom supplies
- \$84 million to address repair and maintenance of aging facilities at the University of Hawaii

### **Lawmakers Push Through Proposals to Increase Affordable Housing and Assist the Homeless**

In an ongoing effort to provide more affordable housing for low to moderate-income families and to help the homeless population, Lawmakers in both houses have advanced strong legislation this session to:

- Dramatically increase the number of affordable rental units statewide
- Repair and maintain current and vacant public housing units
- Transfer ownership of state owned low-income housing units to private organizations
- Increase and improve current transitional housing services for the homeless

## **Bills Advancing to Ease Hawaii's Dependence on Oil**

With energy prices rising and global competition for the world's dwindling oil supply increasing, legislators have made reforming Hawaii's energy policy a strong priority this session. Legislation has advanced in both houses to ease Hawaii's strong dependence on oil by encouraging the production and exploration of alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, hydroelectric, and geothermal. To help promote alternative and minimal consumption of energy in the private sector, legislators are also proposing tax credits for homeowners who install photovoltaic panels.

## **Much Needed Tax Reform Still Possible This Session**

Measures are still alive in the legislature this session to provide much-needed tax reform and relief to our working families. One substantial thing we should do this year is to raise the state's standard deduction to 50 percent of the federal standard deduction. This would reduce the tax burden for about 60 percent of taxpayers and help those who need it the most — the middle class and the working poor. Currently, the state's standard deduction is \$1,500 for a single taxpayer, and \$1,900 for married couples filing jointly. This is far below the standard deductions of most states and far below the federal standard deduction of \$5,000 for a single taxpayer and \$10,000 for married couples filing jointly.

## **Legislators Moving Forward Bills to Promote Agriculture**

Lawmakers in both houses have advanced a number of bills this session aimed at encouraging and improving Hawaii's agricultural industry. The bills range from repairing and maintaining aging irrigation systems throughout the state (including the Wahiawa reservoir and ditch system), to increasing the amount of emergency loans available to farmers, to allocating more resources to enhance agricultural research and marketing.

## **District Issues**

- **Galbraith Lands**  
Bills were carried over from last session that would authorize the Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC) to obtain agricultural land in Waialua from the Galbraith Estate.
- **Leilehua High Football and Baseball Fields**  
Senator Bunda's Capital Improvement Project (CIP) requests to design, equip and construct football and baseball fields for Leilehua High School are awaiting action by the Senate Committee on Ways and Means.
- **Del Monte Pineapple**  
In response to Del Monte's announcement that it will close its 100-year-old pineapple operation on Oahu, lawmakers have moved forward legislation to address housing needs of Del Monte Workers. The legislation would help displaced workers secure housing by providing low interest loans and grants.